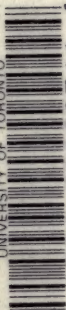


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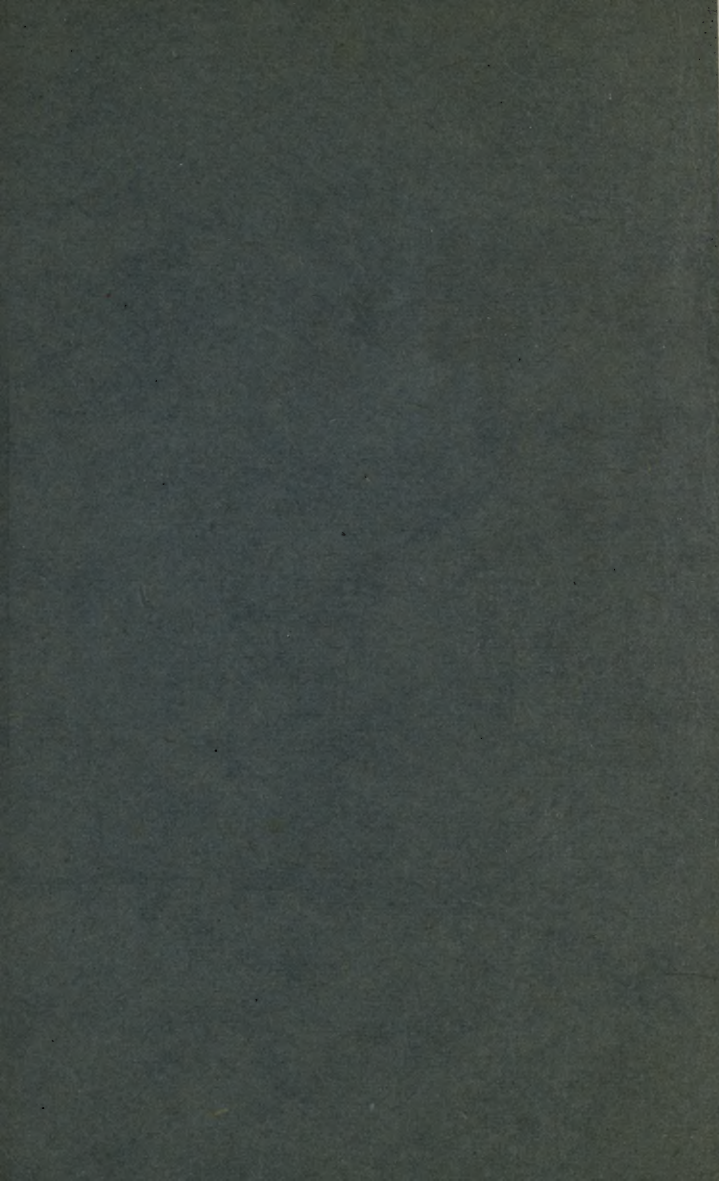
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# THE STORM

BY  
JOHN DRINKWATER

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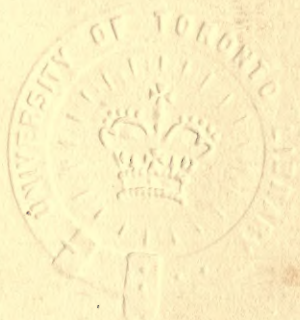
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# THE STORM

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

By

JOHN DRINKWATER



Published by the Author  
at the  
Birmingham Repertory Theatre  
1915

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To  
BARRY V. JACKSON

The Characters are—

*ALICE.*

*JOAN, her young Sister.*

*SARAH.*

*AN OLD MAN.*

*A YOUNG STRANGER.*

# The Storm

*A mountain cottage. It is a midwinter night. Outside a snowstorm rages.*

ALICE is looking through the window. JOAN, her young sister, and SARAH, an old neighbour woman, are sitting over the fire.

*Alice*: It isn't fair of God. Eyes are no good,  
Nor lanterns in a blackness like to that.  
How can they find him out? It isn't fair.

*Sarah:* God is for prayers. You'll anger Him speaking so.

*Alice:* I have prayed these hours, and now I'm  
tired of it.

He is caught in some grip of the rocks, and crying out,

And crying and crying, and none can hear him cry,  
Because of this great beastliness of noise.

*Sarah:* Past crying now, I think.

*Joan:*                                There, take no heed  
Of what she says—it's a rusty mind she has,  
Being old, and wizened with bad luck on the hills.

*Sarah:* Rusty or no, I've a thought the man is dead.

No news has been growing apace from nightfall on  
 Into bad news, and now it's as though one stood  
 At the door and said—we found him lying cold.

*Alice:* Whist! you old bitter woman. Will it  
never stay  
In its wicked fury, . . . and the snow's like a  
black rain



Howling out there would leave tormenting me,  
And let me reason it out in peace a little,  
I could be quite, quite sure that he's not dead.

*Sarah*: Age is a quiet place where you can watch  
The world bent with its pain and still be patient,  
And warm your hands by the fire because you know  
That the newest sorrow and the oldest sorrow are one.  
They will bring him and put him down upon the  
floor:

Be ready for that, girl. There are times when hope  
is cruel

As a fancy-man that goes without good-bye.

*Alice* I have a brain that is known in three shire-  
towns

For a level bargain. It is strange that I should be  
Listening now to a cracked old woman's clatter  
When my own thoughts for him should be so clear  
That I shouldn't heed the words of another body.  
I want no hope—only an easy space  
To remember the skill of my man among the hills  
And how he would surely match their cunning with  
his,—

Or else to count the hours that he's been gone  
And see that his chance is whittled quite away.  
To have a living thought against this fear  
Is all I want—but those screaming devils there  
Beat in my mind like the drums in Carnarvon streets  
That they use when they want to cheat folk into  
thinking

That death is a handsome trade.—And so  
I let a woman with none but leaky wits  
Tell me the way I should be,—when most I need  
To ride no borrowed sense.

*Sarah*: It is not wind,  
For all it is louder than any flood on the hills,  
Nor the crazy snow that maddens you till your brain  
Is like three cats howling upon a wall,

But the darkness that comes creeping on a woman  
When she knows of grief before it is spoken out.  
And the sooner grieved is grief the sooner gone.  
Be ready to make him decent for the grave.

*Joan:* If he should walk in now you will not forget  
The trouble you are putting in the house with your  
talk.

*Sarah:* The trouble is here

*Alice:* If he should walk in now—  
Yes, that's the way to think. I'll work it out,  
Slowly, his doings from when he left the door  
Until he comes again. You stood at the oven  
With cakes half-browned against his tea. And I  
Stood here beside my man and strapped his coat  
Under his chin. He looked across your way—  
He is fond of you, child—he calls you Father Joan  
Because—but that's not it—I told him then  
To-morrow would be time to bring the slates,  
And let him only mend the wire to-day—  
He thought so too and said—it is like a beast  
Greater than half the world and crushed in a trap,  
Shrieking against the pain—what did he say?—  
I have forgotten now, and I had begun  
To follow it all quite clearly—what did he say?

*Joan:* That an hour would see him back, and  
hungry too.

*Alice:* An hour would bring him back—but that is  
nothing.

I know it now: he went to the broken wire  
And mended it—three quarters of an hour—  
And then he would think that after all the slates  
Were best bespoken now—six miles to go:  
He would be about a mile when this began—  
This wrath that will surely last till the Judgment  
Day—  
And that would make two hours till he reached the  
quarry—

But he went on, and the neighbours up and down  
Were scared and went out searching with their  
lanterns,  
Like lighted gnats searching the mines of hell.  
Isn't it queer to see them out there dancing  
When all the time he has gone a twelve mile  
journey—  
And then this old woman came with her neighbour  
duty—  
It's odd folk are,—

*Sarah:* It's a poor thing, spinning tales  
When there's no faith in them.

*Alice:* Hush, I have it all  
Quite clearly now, in spite of that monster baying,—  
Two hours to the quarry, hindered by the night,  
Then half an hour to bargain, then two hours  
For beating back, his boots heavy with snow,  
Or a little longer—five hours and more all told—  
It is nine o'clock—he went five hours ago,  
Or a little more, so that's just how it works—  
He should be coming now along the road,  
Tired—we must warm the cakes again.

*Sarah:* Ay, warm them,  
A dead man's heavy bearing.

*The clock strikes nine.*

*Alice:* That's the time  
To bring him back, and we'll call the lanterns in—  
He must be near by now—

*A man is heard outside, kicking the  
snow off his boots. ALICE opens the  
door, and AN OLD MAN comes in, carry-  
ing an unlit lantern.*

*The Old Man:* My candle is spent.

*JOAN takes the lantern and fits a  
new candle while they speak.*

*Alice:* And you are going out again?  
They have not found him?

*The Old Man:* No. It's not easy there.

*Alice:* Then he didn't go to the quarry after all.

*Joan:* Because they hav'n't found him? That's  
no sign.

They couldn't if he went.

*Alice:* Ah yes—how is it?—

He went, and they've been looking on the hills—  
But have not found him. Yes—he must have gone.  
He should be back. You should have found him for  
me.

*Sarah:* She is strange because of the trouble in  
the house.

I am old, and that is something.

*Alice:* It is not that—

I am caught away from myself by the screaming  
thing

That scourges the hills. And yet in spite of that  
I had reckoned all his doings since he went  
Until his time for coming—but you came—  
You came instead. That is not right.

*The Old Man (taking the lantern and lighting it):*  
We'll send

Across to the quarry now—

*Alice:* It is no use—

He'll not have gone.

*The Old Man:* The night is full of tricks,  
But another hour will have ferreted all the hill.

*He goes out.*

*Sarah:* Simon who took his money down to market.  
And wouldn't change for a good sound fact of cattle,  
Fingered his earnings till a hole was worn  
And came to the house again with an empty bag.

Leave making tales, my girl, poor tales—they bring  
no profit,

Keeping the truth outside, and breaking away  
To a thimbleful of ash themselves. He is dead.  
Think hard on that. When the old king of the world  
With the scourge and flail turns his strokes from the  
wheat

On the goodman's floor and scars the goodman's  
back,

It is no time to wince. Your man is dead.  
And a day and a day make Adam's fall a story.

*Alice:* Not down to the quarry—then—my little  
Joan,

Do you know at all what a man becomes to a woman?  
How should you though? If a man should take  
A patch of the barren hill and dig with his hands  
And down and down till he came to marble and gold,  
And labouring then for a dozen years or twenty  
Should build a place finer than Solomon's hall  
Till strangers with money to travel came to praise it,  
And, when he had dug and hewn and spent his years  
To make it a wonder, should go, and be remembered  
No more than an onion-pedlar in the street  
By the gaping travellers, yet he might be glad,  
If his heart was as big as a woman's, for the thing  
he'd made,

The strong and lovely thing, knowing it risen  
Out of his thought into the talk of the world.  
That's how it is. A woman takes a mate,  
And like the patient builder governs him  
Into the goodman known through a countryside,  
Or the wise friend that the neighbours will seek out,  
And he, for all his love, may never know  
How she has nourished the dear fine mastery  
That bids him daily down the busy road  
And leaves her by the hearth. And when he is dead  
It comes to her that the strength she has given him

To make him a gallant figure among them all  
Has been the thing that has filled her, and she lonely  
Or gossiping with the folk, or about the house.

*Sarah:* When he is dead.

*Alice:* Why should I think of that?  
I am crazed, I say, because of the madness loosed  
And beating against the panes. He is not dead—  
You know it woman—Joan, it would be a lie  
To say my man is dead?

*Joan:* There, sister, wait—  
It is all we can do—there is nothing else to do.

*Sarah:* When he is dead. Let the thought that  
comes unbidden  
Be welcome, for it's the best thought. When he is  
dead.

*Alice:* There is treachery against us—my man—  
my dear—  
My brave love—they are trying to part us now!  
But we must be too strong when . . . . when  
he is dead . . . .

*There is a knock at the door. She  
makes a half movement towards it.*

He would not knock. See who it is.

*JOAN opens the door and a YOUNG  
TRAVELLER, buffeted and breathless,  
comes in.*

*The Stranger:* By Thor!  
There's beauty trampling men like crumpled leaves.  
May I come in till it's gone?

*Joan:* Surely.

*The Stranger:* I set  
Every sinew taut against this power,  
This supple torrent of might that suddenly rose  
Out of the fallen dusk and sang and leapt

Like an athlete of the gods frenzied with wine.  
It seemed to rear challenging against me,  
As though the master from Valhalla's tables,  
Grown heady in his revels, had cried out—  
Behold me now crashing across the earth  
To shake the colonies of antic men  
Into a fear shall be a jest, my fellows!  
And I measured myself against this bragging pride,  
Climbing step by step through the blinding riot  
Of frozen flakes swung on the cataract wind,  
My veins praising the tyranny that was matched  
Against this poor ambitious body of mine.

*Alice:* The storm is drenched with treachery and  
sin—  
It is not good to praise it.

*The Stranger:* You on the hills  
Grow dulled, maybe, to the royalty that finds  
In your crooked world a thousand splendid hours,  
And a storm to you is but a hindered task  
Or a wall for mending or a gap in the flock.  
But I was strange among this gaiety  
Plying black looms in a black firmament,  
This joy that was spilt out of the iron heavens  
Where pity is not bidden to the hearts  
Of the immaculate gods. I was a dream,  
A cold monotony suddenly thrust  
Into a waking world of lusty change,  
A wizened death elected from the waste  
To strive and mate with eager lords of tumult.  
Beauty was winged about me, darkling speed  
Took pressure of earth and smote against my face;  
I rode upon the front of heroic hours,  
And once was on the crest of the world's tide,  
Unseared as the elements.—But he mastered me,  
That god striking a star for holiday,  
And filled himself with great barbaric laughter  
To see me slink away.

*Alice:*                               It is no god,  
But brainless anger, a gaunt and evil thing  
That blame can't reach.

*The Stranger:*                   Not all have eyes to see.—  
I'm harsh with my words, but I come from a harsh  
    quarrel  
With larger thews than man's.

*Alice:*                               Stranger, I'd give  
Comely words to any who knocks at the door.  
You are welcome—but leave your praising of this  
    blight.  
You safely gabbing of sly and cruel furies,  
Like a child laughing before a cage of tigers.  
You with your fancy talk of lords and gods  
And your hero-veins—young man, do you know this  
    night  
Is eating through my bones into the marrow,  
And creeping round my brain till thought is dead,  
And making my heart the oldest thing of any?  
Do you see those lights?

*The Stranger:*               They seemed odd moving there,  
In a storm like this.

*Alice:*                           A man is lost on the hills.

*The Stranger:* That's bad.   But who?

*Alice:*                           My man is lost on the hills.

*Sarah:* She has it now; her man is dead on the  
    hills.

*The Stranger:* I talked amiss, not knowing of  
    trouble here.  
But why should he be dead?

*Alice:*                           The woman is worn,  
Her mind is worn, and she lives out of the world.  
You ask at once as any wise man would.  
I have told her and told and told that he's not dead,

And my young sister, too, though but a girl,  
Says it, and she has a head beyond her years.  
He is lost for an hour, or maybe for a night,  
But never dead. That is the way you think?  
It is waiting that steals your proper sense away;  
And then, although you know, you let in fear  
Blaspheming the thing you know—it is waiting  
to-night  
In the midst of an idiot wrath drumming and  
drumming  
Like a plague of bees in swarm above your eyes.  
I do not know—I have not any strength  
To fathom it now, and there is none to tell me.

*Sarah:* She knows it all, though the thing is hard  
to say.

*Alice:* Have done! Young stranger, you have  
travelled the world  
I think, or have grown learned in great cities,  
And can tell the ways things go—is it not wrong  
To say that a man because of an ugly night  
Should perish on his home-ground? He would find  
a road  
Out of a danger such as that, because  
That is the way things happen—tell me now?

*The Stranger:* It is likely that he would.

*Alice:* You hear that, Joan—  
A traveller who has been in foreign dangers  
And comes a scholar from a hundred cities  
Says it is well, and that we must be patient.

*The Stranger:* No, I've not travelled, and I only  
say a man  
Knowing the hills would likely weather a storm.

*Alice:* There, there—you must not take it back  
again,  
Because you know, and you have said it is well.

*Sarah:* They cut a stone that is like a small church window,  
And they carve a name and a line out of the book,  
And when that's done there is nothing then to doubt.

*The storm has suddenly cleared,  
The silence falls upon them strangely,  
and there is a pause.*

*Alice:* It is spent at last. He will come from his shelter now.

My dear—come soon. Set the kettle again.

*JOAN does so. There is another pause.*

I have my thought again. It is an end.

I am broken. There is no pity anywhere.

*The Stranger:* The lights are coming.

*Sarah:* The anger never bates,  
But scourges us till time betrays the limbs,  
And strikes the tongue, and puts pence on the eyes,  
And leaves the latch for stranger hands to lift.

*The blackness beyond the window  
has given place to clear starlight on  
the hills. A NUMBER OF MEN with lan-  
terns pass by. There is a knock:  
ALICE opens the door, and THE OLD  
MAN stands there with his lighted  
lantern. She looks at him, and neither  
speaks. She turns away to the table.*

*Alice:* Why have we waited . . . all this  
time . . . to know . . .

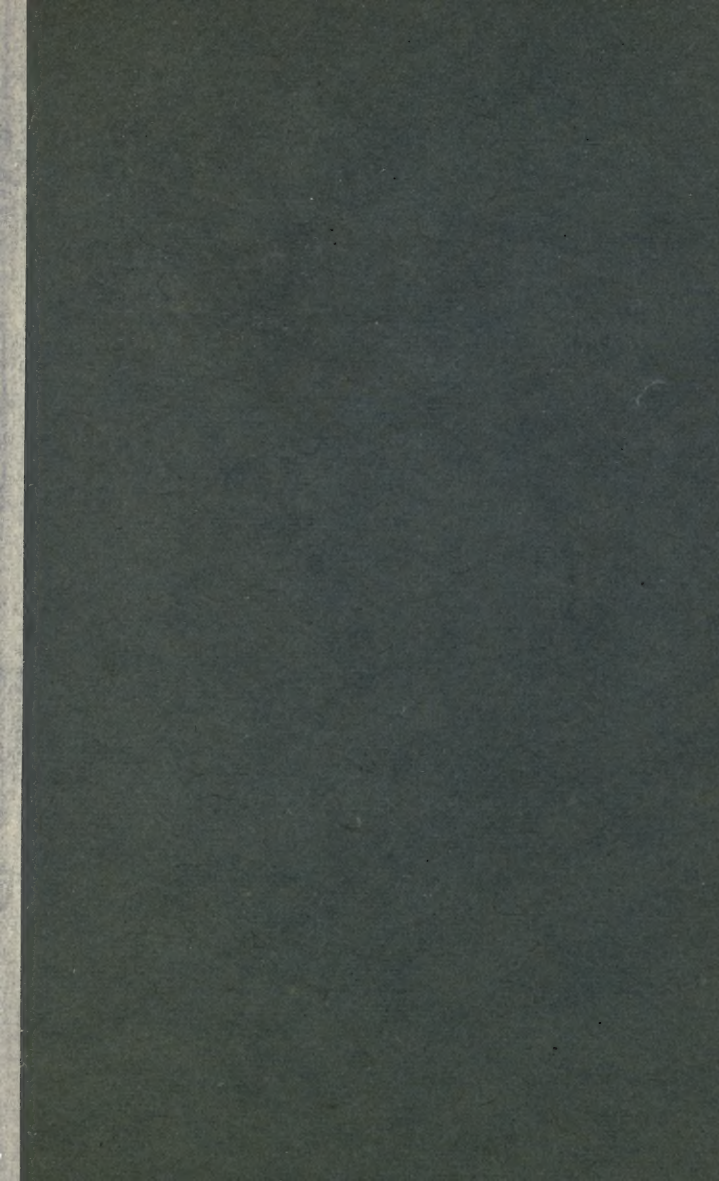
*Her sorrow breaks over her.*

THE END

*THE STORM* was first produced at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, on Saturday, May 8th, 1915, under the direction of the author, with the following cast:—

<i>Alice</i>	-	-	-	-	Cecily Byrne
<i>Joan</i>	-	-	-	-	Betty Pinchard
<i>Sarah</i>	-	-	-	-	Margaret Chatwin
<i>An Old Man</i>	-	-	-	-	W. Ribton Haines
<i>A Young Stranger</i>	-	-	-	-	E. Ion Swinley

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